

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 17, 2023

Chairman Jack Reed
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Roger Wicker
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Mike Rogers
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Adam Smith
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written feedback as House and Senate conferees finalize the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). As you engage in good-faith negotiations toward a bipartisan bill, we write to strongly urge the removal of Section 651 in the House-passed NDAA, titled, “Rights of parents of children attending schools operated by the Department of Defense Education Activity.” This section would impose burdensome, unnecessary, and redundant requirements on public schools funded and managed by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), an organization within the Department of Defense that provides military connected students and families with access to a high-quality public education. We oppose the inclusion of Section 651 in the final FY24 NDAA for the following reasons:

- 1. DoDEA schools have a strong track record of high performance that should be recognized and supported.** DoDEA operates dozens of high-performing, fully accredited public schools around the world. Each day, more than 8,000 dedicated educators serve about 66,000 students in 160 DoDEA schools across 11 nations, seven states, and two U.S. territories. Almost 60 percent of students served by DoDEA schools are students of color.¹ Between 2013 and 2022, DoDEA schools were the only state-level jurisdiction in the nation that experienced an increase in average 8th grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).² Further, in the same time period, DoDEA was one of only three state-level jurisdictions – alongside Puerto Rico

¹ <https://dodea.widen.net/s/hwlwrrdfc5/dodea-by-the-numbers-placemat-sy-22-23>

² <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/scores/?grade=8>

and Utah – that did not experience a decline in 8th grade mathematics scores on NAEP.³ DoDEA schools and the students they serve meet academic proficiency metrics at a higher rate than most other states, and these outcomes are the result of policy decisions made in the interest of public education and the students they serve. Specifically, these outcomes are made possible by an adequate balance between local control and oversight from DoDEA, sufficient per-pupil funding, well-compensated and highly valued educators, racial and socioeconomic integration, strong partnerships with LEAs and local organizations and service providers, wraparound services and basic needs support, and opportunities for authentic family engagement.⁴

Section 651 attempts to solve a problem that shows little or no evidence of existing and would codify onerous, unnecessary requirements, many of which are already in practice at DoDEA schools, such as opportunities for parents to have access to and review information or decisions being made by their child's school. These redundant requirements may undermine the existing processes, structures, and policies that have been instrumental to the success of DoDEA schools.

2. **Effective family-school partnerships are best achieved by a collaborative, complementary relationship between educators, families, and community leaders to advance programs, practices, and policies that empower every parent to make their child's potential a reality.** Students whose families are engaged in their education are more likely to attend school, avoid discipline problems, achieve at higher levels, and graduate. Family engagement plans and programs are critical to developing supportive learning environments for students, maintaining safe working conditions for educators, and fostering a culture of success, achievement, and inclusion. Authentic family engagement, driven by strong family-school partnerships, is characterized by inclusive, accessible policies that meaningfully incorporate parents and families into a school's decision-making process. Research has shown that when families advocate for school improvements, all children receive a better education. We urge you to prioritize our nation's children and strengthen evidence-based existing practices and programs that enhance the relationship between families and educators across the country and not weaken existing practices by introducing new and duplicative procedures that are not grounded in research.
3. **The final Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) NDAA excluded similar language as the result of a thoughtful bipartisan compromise.** When a similarly worded parental rights provision was included in Section 572 of the House-passed FY23 NDAA⁵, House and Senate conferees worked together on a bipartisan basis to strike the language, and instead focus on a report to the Committees of Armed Services in both the Senate and House required to be issued 6 months following the passage assessing the current state of parental rights and involvement in DoDEA schools. That report has yet to be issued. Congress should

³ <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/mathematics/states/scores/?grade=8>

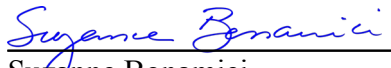
⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/us/schools-pandemic-defense-department.html>

⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr7900/BILLS-117hr7900pcs.pdf>

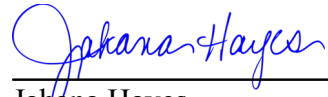
wait for the results of that report to avoid duplication or unnecessary additional burdens on educators and school administrators.

The provisions included in Section 651 of the House-passed NDAA undermine the importance of nonpartisanship and authentic family engagement in DoDEA schools and the tradition of excellence embodied by DoDEA students and educators. We urge that you follow the precedent set during FY23's NDAA negotiations and exclude Section 651 from the FY24 NDAA.

Sincerely,



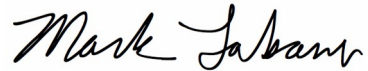
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Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



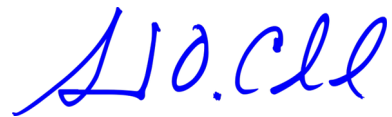
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Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



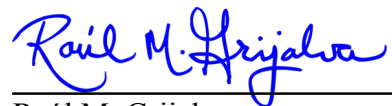
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Salud Carbajal
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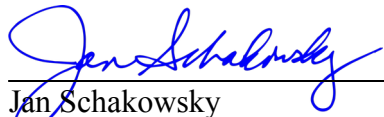
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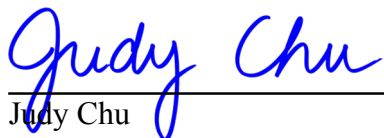
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Nikema Williams
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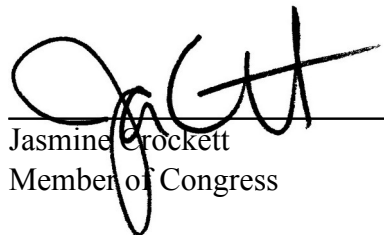
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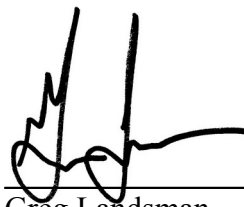
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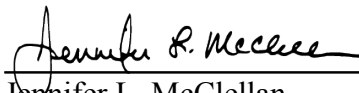
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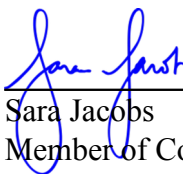
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